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The status of the Rough-winged Swallow *Stelgidopteryx ruficollis* in Suriname

by F. Haverschmidt

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The Rough-winged Swallow *Stelgidopteryx ruficollis* is a rather common breeding bird on sandy ground in Suriname, nesting in isolated pairs in burrows in low sandwalls and often in descending tunnels in level ground. I do not know whether it ever digs the burrow itself, but it regularly nests in burrows of the Swallow-wing *Chelidoptera tenebrosa*, which is a characteristic bird of this habitat.

Breeding activity starts in February and lasts into June:- males with enlarged gonads 13 Feb; female in burrow with finished nest ready for eggs, 26 Feb; nest with 4 heavily incubated eggs, 9 Apr; nest with 2 nestlings and 1 egg, 8 Apr; nestlings just having left the nest, being fed by their parents, 22 May and 12 June; nest with 2 nestlings and 1 egg, 6 June (Haverschmidt 1968).

During my residence in Suriname, 1946-1968, I observed yearly near my home on the left bank of the Suriname River just outside Paramaribo, where this swallow does not breed, loose groups of *S. ruficollis* hurrying northward, following the river downstream. They were certainly not migrating in the proper sense, but they behaved like Barn Swallows *Hirundo rustica* on migration, flying low and rapidly. The majority came over in the late afternoon between 1630 and 1800, and I observed these afternoon flights all around Paramaribo and even over the centre of the city. Apparently they were heading for a communal roost, where the total number must have been very great. I observed these flights between February (earliest date 18 Feb 1962) and October (latest date 6 Oct 1957). The greatest numbers were seen during March and April through well into August. Sometimes a number settled down on telephone wires, where it was easy to collect specimens. All were moulting their primaries and in non-breeding conditions. These facts suggested to me that 2 different populations were involved, one resident and breeding from February into June, and a second one composed only of immigrants from February to October.

In the report of a collection of Surinam birds collected 1912-1914, Bangs & Penard (1918) described a new race, *Stelgidopteryx ruficollis caccabatus*, (from a series of 7 birds collected in the vicinity of Paramaribo in April, May and June 1913 and 1914, as being "similar to the nominate *ruficollis*, but the

whole upperparts including wings and tail much darker, more blackish, less brownish; size slightly smaller and differing from *uropygialis* in having the rump not conspicuously paler than the back, but the upper parts of about the same colour" (quoted *verbatim* from original description). Later investigation has in fact shown that so-called *caccabatus* was larger, not smaller, than nominate *ruficollis*.

Zimmer (1955) rejected this race as the few Surinam specimens at hand then easily matched a series of over 200 *ruficollis* and he failed to substantiate the validity of *caccabatus*, which he believed should be submerged. In Peter's *Checklist of Birds of the World* (1960), in which the American Swallows were recorded by E. E. Eisenmann, *caccabatus* is, however, listed and is said to inhabit the Gran Sabana region of southeastern Bolivar in Venezuela, Guyana, Suriname and French Guiana, its southern limits being not known.

The type locality of *caccabatus* obtained on 19 June 1913 can be more specifically identified. The type was collected by Egbert Graanoogst, one of the principal collectors for Penard, who had a farm at "De Tweede Rijweg" just west of Paramaribo, a grassland area where cattle were kept. It is a place I know well—a very unlikely spot for nesting Rough-winged Swallows and in the very area where the afternoon flights of this bird are such a regular feature. I therefore wondered whether *caccabatus* had been described from one of these migrants.

At my request the series of *Stelgidopteryx* which I had collected and which are now in the Leiden Museum, consisting both of breeding birds and the immigrants, was sent to Mr. E. E. Eisenmann at the American Museum of Natural History at New York. Assisted by F. Farrand, he kindly compared them with other material from Suriname. Moreover the type specimen and series of *caccabatus* were examined in the Museum of Comparative Zoology (M.C.Z.) at Cambridge, Mass. by Dr. Lester Short and at my request also by Dr. R. Paynter.

Since in swallows the 9th primary (the longest) of moulting birds is either only partly grown or very worn, the 7th primary (counting from inside) was also measured.

TABLE I
Length of 7th and 9th primaries of *Stelgidopteryx ruficollis* in Suriname

		7th Primary (mm)		9th Primary (mm)	
<i>S. ruficollis</i> (in Leiden Museum and AMNH)	Breeders	6 ♂♂	92-99 (95.6)	6 ♂♂	100-109 (105)
		1 ♀	91	2 ♀♀	99, 100
		2 0 0	93, 95	2 0 0	100, 105
	Immigrants	3 ♂♂	100-104 (102.3)	3 ♂♂	112-114 (113)
	(n=8)	3 ♀♀	98-107 (105.6)	4 ♀♀	(part sheath)
<i>S. r. caccabatus</i> (in M.C.Z.)		2 0 0		1 0	105
	Holotype	19.vi.13	♂ 99		115
		11.iv.14	♂ 98		117 (worn)
		4.v.14	0 101		111
		11.v.14	♂ 98		107
		11.iv.14	♀ 101		112
			Average	99.8	Average

Notes: 0 = unsexed

Sex of the specimens was copied from the original labels.

Weights: 9 breeding ♂♂ 14-18 (15)g; 2 breeding ♀♀ 14.5, 15g.

12 immigrant ♀♀ 14-18 (16.3)g; 4 immigrant ♀♀ 15-17 (15.9)g.

Eisenmann and Farrand both agree with me that there must be 2 populations occurring in Suriname, a breeding one (specimens obtained between 26 February and 12 June) and a migrant one (specimens between 11 April and 11 August) the last population presumably originating in the temperate zone of southern South America and spending the austral winter within the tropics. All the migrant specimens are moulting their primaries (with numbers 5-8 being freshly full grown and the remainder in sheath, partly grown or old), which agrees with the southern hemisphere schedule of migratory swallows. The primaries run longer in these migrants and their weights average greater than in the Suriname breeding birds, the new feathers making the wings and tail look darker. On the other hand, none of the breeding birds (found to have enlarged gonads or taken in the nest burrow) has moulting primaries. In Dr. Eisenmann's opinion the race *caccabatus* was plainly based on the migratory southern population and not the breeding birds and is presumably, therefore, a synonym of the nominate *ruficollis*. This would leave the breeding birds unnamed, but in view of the fact that the size differences may be clinal and are not clearly marked, and in the absence of obvious colour characters, taxonomic recognition does not seem worthwhile or necessary.

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The taxonomic status of the Canary Islands Oystercatcher *Haematopus (niger) meadewaldoi*

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The taxonomic status of Meade-Waldo's Black Oystercatcher or Canarian Black Oystercatcher *Haematopus niger meadewaldoi* Bannerman (1913) of the Canary Islands remains an enigma. Apart from a white patch in the wing, the bird is similar in plumage and soft part colouration to the African Black Oystercatcher *H. moquini* (Bannerman 1913). Three hypotheses have been proposed to explain its taxonomic status: either it is a melanistic subspecies of *H. ostralegus* (Stresemann 1927); or a distinct subspecies of the African Black Oystercatcher *H. moquini* Bonaparte (1856) (Bannerman 1913, 1963); or individuals recorded in the Canary Islands represent long-distance vagrants